

EXAMINING HIGH- IMPACT COACHING PRACTICES: A STUDY OF LIFE SKILL  
DEVELOPMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PROGRAMS WITHIN THE  
GREATER DAYTON AREA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the high-impact practices that football coaches, within the Greater Dayton Area (GDA), were utilizing to develop life-skills in their athletes. This qualitative study will add to the base of knowledge surrounding life-skill development (LSD) in adolescents, while also supporting local football programs by providing a starting point for the inclusion of LSD in their daily routines. This study utilized the Basic Needs of Coaching Paradigm (BNCP) as the framework to maintain focus on the optimal outcomes for the student-athletes through the behaviors of coaches and the impacts those behaviors have on student-athletes. Through the course of semi-structured interviews, coaches took the time to explain how they viewed their role, how they viewed their relationship with their athletes, and what life-skill development meant to them. What resulted was an opportunity to create something meaningful that could be used as an aid to help the entire coaching community. More specifically, this study will lead to the creation of the Life-Skill Development Toolkit, which will become a valuable resource for coaching staffs to help them learn about LSD and how to implement it within their programs, which will lead to the development of life-skills in high school athletes and further development of coaching staffs.

This journey is dedicated to the person that is most responsible for who I am today, my wife Amy. She always pushed me to go farther than I wanted to because she seen my potential and without her, I would not be the husband, father, son, friend, coach and human that exists today! This would not have been possible without her love, support, guidance and unwillingness to allow me to be lazy and just exist.

To my children; Kaia, Cameron and Connor, I hope this shows you that anything is possible if you set your mind to it and never give up on your dreams!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey would not have been possible had it not been for a lot of people that cared about me. I never thought that I would form bonds with people that would shape the person I have become. This is not a knock on the program, but I can honestly say that I have learned more from all of you than I have from any class. I cannot thank everyone individually but there are some special folks that I do need to personally thank:

Professor Witenstein: There is so much that needs to be said about you and the role you played in getting me here. I wanted to quit very early in Term 1 but you took time out of your day to come to my office and talk some sense into me. From that day forward, I knew that I could make this happen (I had some momentary confidence issues throughout but you were always there to push me). Your mentorship and guidance helped make this process more enjoyable and I am grateful for the relationship we have been able to develop.

Dr. Erin Martin: Did you ever think that I would be here? We were together for every term in the beginning and your feedback absolutely crushed me, but I think it ended up making me a much better writer, it REALLY did. You taught me that meme's have a special place in presentations and that I can keep my sense of humor while pursuing this degree. We had so much fun together that I would almost consider taking Ethics again just so we can make Kant jokes.

Dr. Heather Parsons: You deserve a special thanks because you have evolved beyond just being a member on my committee and have turned into one of those people on campus that I come to for advice on EVERYTHING. You are a tremendous person and I am so glad that you were able to be on my committee.

The Wolfpack (Amanda & Stacey): Holy smokes, we made it! Going back to the early days of this process, we formed a bond that has been solid. You both have helped me through so much over the past three years and have played a key role in the person that I have become. We created too many presentations and worked on countless assignments together, but the one that will live on for eternity is our first group project where we played dress up for Matt. You both have a special place in my heart and I will always be here for you both!

Trent Barber: My brother from another mother! You and I go together like peas and carrots. I am so glad that you decided to join our cohort and go on this excursion with me. We have shared so many laughs together and gotten each other through tough times. I did not enter this program thinking that I was going to make friends, let alone get as close with someone as you and I have. I love you brother and we are together for life.

Aaron: It has been a wild ride, but we made it! I have not forgotten about our podcast either, we should make sure we use our conceptual framework from the Organizational Culture class as the premise for the whole thing too.

Chelsea the Great: Thank you for being such a good friend and helping me get through the tough times that this adventure shared with us.

There are so many other individuals who played an important role in getting me here but I cannot just continue writing individual messages for you all, just know that I thank you from the bottom of my heart for being there for me and sharing laughs along the way. The Zoom Room will always be there for anyone who needs a good laugh, just because we are done with this adventure, it does not mean that we are done being friends! You are all stuck with me for life.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
BNCP	Basic Needs Coaching Paradigm
BNT	Basic Needs Theory
GDA	Greater Dayton Area
LSD	Life-Skill Development
SDT	Self-Determination Theory

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **PROBLEM OF PRACTICE**

#### **Topic**

In Ohio, there were 709 high schools that had a varsity football team in the 2021 football season and of that total, 44 schools were within the Greater Dayton Area (OHSAA, 2022). This creates an opportunity for only 44 head football coaches to potentially lead their team to not only success on the field, but also to facilitate the development of life-skills that their athletes can take with them into adulthood. This study aims to highlight the high-impact practices used by high school football coaches in the Greater Dayton Area (GDA), that aid in the life skill development of their athletes. Being a resident, and a current assistant coach in the GDA, I have chosen to focus on these coaches because we are part of the same community.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Pierce, et.al (2020), stated that “high school sport has been identified as a site for leadership development in popular culture” (p. 2). In 2021, there were 7.6 million students participating in high school sports within the 50 states and District of Columbia (National Federation of High Schools, 2022). In the state of Ohio, there were approximately 340,000 high school student-athletes in the 2018-19 academic year (NFHS, 2019). During that four-month span, it can be estimated that these student-athletes spend 90 minutes a day with their coach and the rest of the coaching staff, per sport, resulting in countless hours together during some of the most impressionable years of a young person’s life (Ruser, et.al, 2020). Some students will play two or three sports in a year, so there are even more interactions between coaches and players. Sport has

been identified as a suitable activity for promoting positive youth development when an appropriate context is created and when competencies are promoted in an intentional and systematic manner (Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2005). As Camire and Trudel (2013) suggested, “football helped students learn life skills, develop a connectedness to school, and remain engaged academically” (p. 48).

Sport can also play a significant role in negative outcomes in youth athletes. In their study, Kendellen and Camire (2015) discussed how some interactions with coach favoritism and coach superiority led to inappropriate social interactions and damage to the development of trust, teamwork, communication, and self-confidence. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how different coaches in GDA are using their time with their athletes to aid in the development of skills that adolescent students need for success in the next stages of their life development. In this study, the goal is to identify the tactics and programs being included in coaching philosophies, in the GDA, that lead to positive development of life skills of their student-athletes. By focusing on the value added to student-athletes for their futures, it is imperative to understand how combining sports development with the development of life-skills can coexist.

### **The Problem of Practice**

While speaking with coaches in the GDA, it is apparent that not much has changed in how high school sports coaches view the development of their athletes. While I was in high school, development was strictly focused on getting better at your sport and that was measured by wins and losses. I have coached in other regions of the United States and it was always a similar message, a coach was measured by the success of their team. Coming to GDA, I was not expecting to find a different attitude. High school

coaches in the Dayton area have shown a willingness to try to educate their athletes on more than just sports, some are just not able to determine the right way to incorporate life skill development. I have witnessed different coaching staffs try to build a leadership council that develops leaders within their team. Unfortunately, that precludes the majority of the team and has typically led to signs of favoritism for the specific athletes who seem to always be chosen. When developing life skills in athletes, it is not enough to just have a knowledge base to turn to when needed, high school coaches need to form synergy between that development and their general coaching philosophy (Collins, et al., 2009; Camire, et al., 2012).

As stated by Pierce, et al., (2020), “high school sport provides the opportunity for youth to exercise psychosocial skills to enhance sport performance and can be a salient context for positive youth development and learning of life skills” (p. 1). Whether it be basic ideas, such as winning or losing, teamwork, sportsmanship, or much deeper lessons that develop life skills, sports have consistently been viewed as a great instructor of life. Coaches have begun facing challenges with youth who lack the ability to be accountable, lack motivation, have poor communication skills, have problems with parents, and struggle with school (Gould, et.al, 2006). With the proper direction, sport has the unique ability to combine all of those basic life lessons into a dynamic setting that can mirror settings that young people will often face in adulthood (Camire, et al., 2014; Vella, et al., 2013; Ferris, et al., 2015; Newman, et al., 2017, Jacobs & Wright, 2018).

Life skills in the context of this study refer to behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills that allow young people to be successful in a variety of environments (Camire, et al., 2012). A more functional definition of what some of the

important life skills this study is discussing would be leadership, communication, teamwork, self-confidence, perseverance, respect, sportsmanship, and self-regulation are some of the most important (Camire, et.al, 2018; Kendellen & Camire, 2019; Cronin & Allen, 2017; Kendellen, et.al, 2017). High school sports coaches can, and should, play a key role in developing those skills; through instruction, being a role-model, or through practice (Gould & Carson, 2008). According to Collins, et.al (2009), creating a coaching philosophy, based in research, that supports “a theory to practice approach could be a significant factor in improving coaching development, and in turn, the experience of the athlete” (p. 31). One of the major improvements is that all coaches have their own philosophy and beliefs in how their program should be run and what the priorities should be. Some coaches place winning as the ultimate priority, some make skill development their priority, and others make developing quality young people their priority.

### ***Researcher Role and Positionality***

Positionality has dual purposes; it provides a way to describe a person’s view on the world and it also describes the position a researcher adopts for a research task (Holmes, A. G. D., 2020). I am uniquely positioned within this study as an assistant high school football coach in the GDA. In this role, I am able to view, from a distance, how different coaches interact with their athletes. On the other hand, I do bring some biases with me as part of this research. In order to minimize those biases, introspective reflexivity was used. Patnaik (2013) states, “introspective reflexivity acknowledged that the researcher’s experiences, attitudes, and emotions will affect engagement with the participants and subsequent analysis of data” (para 9). By maintaining a reflective



journal, I was able to spend time writing notes about my interactions with participants and information before analyzing data.

Already being a member of the GDA coaching community, I have access to a long list of coaches that wished to participate in this study. To keep the participant list manageable, I used convenience sampling to develop my list of participants, which allowed for intentional selection based on school factors; public/private, enrollment size, enrollment demographics, and socioeconomic data (Omona, 2013). Prior to officially reaching out to prospective participants, I ensured that I sought permission from the school's administration, specifically the principals and athletic director's, of the schools. To ensure protection of potentially sensitive information, interview data was secured in a password protected folder within my laptop and also on an external hard drive.

### **Justification of the Problem**

According to Bowers, et.al (2014), many studies that explore how the adult environment can have an impact on the development of youth have primarily focused on the influence of parents and the parent-youth relationship, but the potential impacts from non-parental adults have been neglected. At an area school that I currently coach, the head football coach readily admits that the team "has a leadership problem" but does not know how to fix it (Byrd, personal communication, 2022). He has tried providing leadership books to athletes, he has tried creating a leadership committee, and has now begun trying to create a leadership development curriculum that revolves around meeting monthly after school. This is a decorated veteran of the U.S. Army, a high school social studies teacher, and a person who has over a decade of coaching experience, and all of the training that he was provided in leadership development through the Army and his

background as a high school teacher, he still cannot find a concise way to develop leadership skills in his athletes, which is just one aspect of a life skill development program. This coach developed soldiers during a time of war, but yet he struggles to find ways to develop leadership skills in teenagers. This makes me believe that many other coaches in the GDA want to create a successful, and sustainable, life skill development program, but do not have the knowledge to implement a plan (Collins, et al., 2009; Lim, et al., 2019; Camire, et al., 2018; Turgeon, et al., 2021).

This study aims to take an asset-based approach and collate GDA high school coaches and their high impact practices that incorporate life skills development into their coaching philosophy and find ways to make the development a highlight of that philosophy. An asset-based approach to life skill development focuses on creating methods that allow high school athletes to become more motivated, directed, socially competent, compassionate, and psychologically vigorous adults (Intrator & Siegal, 2008). By understanding what high impact practices these high school coaches are doing to develop life skills for their student-athletes, a plan can be created that can be shared with other coaches who are trying to determine how to begin a life skill development plan within their coaching philosophy that will further strengthen their impact on the lives of young people.

### **Deficiencies in the Organizational Knowledge Record**

The deficiencies in the organizational knowledge record point to the lack of available research within the United States, about coaches making a concerted effort to make, or how to make, life skill development an important aspect of their coaching philosophy. As discussed by Whitley, et al., “the quality of evidence reported for sport-

based youth development interventions in the U.S. was largely classified as weak and incoherent” (2019, p. 18). There are a range of factors that influence that conclusion; bias in publication, authors censorship, and the regional politics being just a few (Whitley, et. al, 2019). Large-scale studies in Canada have shown that coaches there undergo some type of training to become a coach but in most cases, the training does not have a focus on life skill development (Turgeon, et al., 2021). Camire, et al. (2012), points out results that stated “many of the coaches assumed that coaching required little knowledge or education and that some coaches believed that Positive Youth Development occurs automatically through simple participation” (p. 2).

Much of the available research focuses on areas related to this topic; life-skill development, positive youth development, coach roles, coach development, and the coach-athlete relationship. However, studies between life-skill development and coaching is limited. Life-skill development (Sackett & Gano-Overway, 2017; Holt, et.al, 2017; Camire, et.al, 2018; Pierce, et.al, 2018), directs the attention to the relationship between sports and the development of various skills that each of the authors describes as being key as youth make the transition to adulthood. The development of a coach (Dohme, et.al, 2019; Turgeon, et.al, 2021), both on the field, and off, that leads to the creation of a mindset that focuses on positive youth development (PYD). The process of PYD describes the actual effort given to create, implement, and deliver outcomes that would be considered positive development in young people (Bean, et.al, 2018; Pierce, et.al, 2020; Kendellen, et.al, 2017).

Understanding the role coaches play in various facets of an athlete’s development is an integral part of an environment that allows for their athletes to thrive (Camire &

Trudel, 2013; Collins, et.al, 2009; Camire, et.al, 2014). The high school coach has the responsibility to create a safe learning environment for their athletes to develop the necessary skills that support growth in sport and life (Lim, et.al, 2019; Mariani, 2020; Van Mullem & Mathias, 2021). The coach-athlete relationship is an important relationship that provides direct impact on an athlete's sense of satisfaction and fulfillment (Rezania & Gurney, 2016; Gearity & Murray, 2011) and their motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Olympiou, et. al, 2008).

This literature expresses the importance of life skill development by addressing the key components to support; life-skill development, PYD, coach's role and development, and the coach-athlete relationship. The literature lacks the connection between these components and how each can work together to support an organizational philosophy that places importance on the development of life skills in youth athletes.

### **Audience**

This study will have the intended impact on high school athletic programs in the Greater Dayton Area, more specifically, high school coaches. By having a better understanding of how coaches engage in high impact practices about skill development; assisting in the development of their children. This study will also be useful for parents and guardians. High school football coaches play an important role as a non-parental adult, in the positive development of youth (Bowers, et. al, 2014). Non-parental adults, such as teachers or coaches, can have a significant role in young people's school and social lives, helping develop the skills and relationships necessary as they grow and develop (Bowers, et. al, 2014).

## **Overview of Framework, Methods, Research Questions**

The Basic Needs Coaching Paradigm (BNCP), which prescribes that coaches have the ability to influence the experiences of athletes on multiple levels, directly and indirectly, is designed to influence how coaches develop their professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge in ways that will lead to positive changes in the behaviors of those coaches (Hook & Newland, 2018). This focus on change and development within the BNCP is the catalyst for my research. By focusing on the areas of influence a football coach has on their athletes, it can be determined if that coach needs to focus on their own professional, interpersonal, and/or intrapersonal development.

Utilizing the BNCP as the framework for this study, the primary research focus will be how do coaches in the GDA view their role in the development of athletes' lives outside sport? By seeking an answer to that question, some consequential questions will also be explored:

1. What high impact practices and methods are coaches engaging in that are contributing to their student-athletes development of life-skills?
2. What would a life skill development program, (rooted in the BNCP) that leverages the high impact practices of the GDA high school football coaches, look like?

## **Limitations**

This study is focused solely on the Greater Dayton, Ohio region and the experiences of high school coaches in this area. This region did provide a diverse sample size that allowed for rich and thick descriptions, but the study lacks regional diversity due to focusing solely on the GDA and excluding additional areas surrounding Dayton. There

may be other areas of the state, or country, that have challenges in this area or that have created programs that help coaches. Further research can be completed on additional regions of the country that would allow for a much larger sample size and access to experiences that are different from those that occur in Southwest Ohio.

An additional limitation comes in the form of researcher bias, defined by Pannucci and Wilkins (2010), as errors being introduced into sampling, data collection and data analysis that encourages an outcome over others. As a coach who believes in life skill development, my bias towards other coaches was an area that needed constant attention and reflection to ensure trustworthiness.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Theoretical Framework**

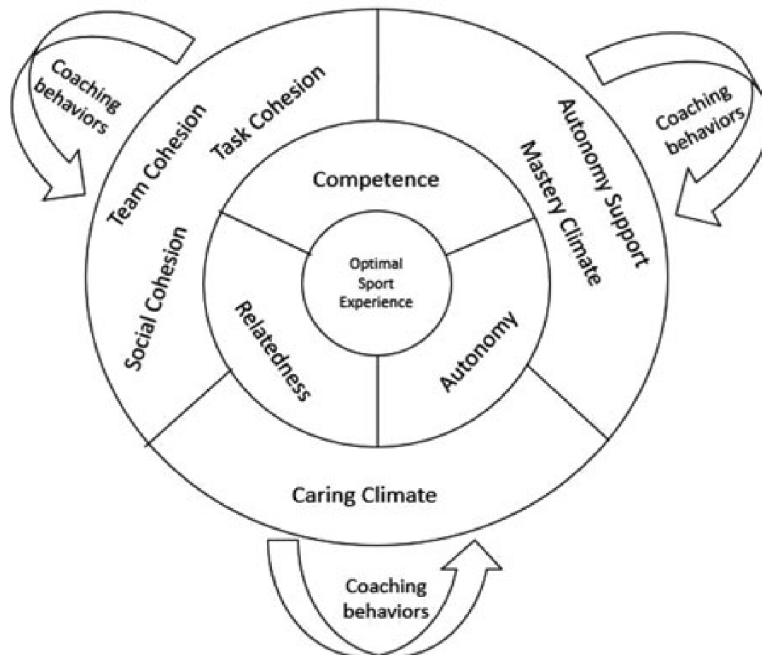
The Basic Needs Coaching Paradigm (BNCP) was developed out of Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination (SDT) theory and Basic Needs (BNT) sub theory. These theories stand out when trying to understand the factors that influence an athlete experience in sports, both positively and negatively (Hook & Newland, 2018). Ryan and Deci (2000) explained SDT as "an approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods and organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' evolved inner resources for personality development and behavioral self-regulation" (p. 68). The SDT stated that a person has three critical needs that are essential to social development, well-being, growth, and integrating within a group, those are competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The BNT from Deci and Ryan (2002) stated that by fulfilling the needs of competence,

relatedness, and autonomy, a person will find more intrinsic motivation towards achieving satisfaction and positive well-being.

The BNCP investigates the ways in which a coach can meet the fundamental needs of athletes, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Hook & Newland, 2018; Ntoumanis, 2012). By addressing these needs, coaches can enhance athletes' overall sporting experiences and contribute to their optimal well-being, enjoyment, and satisfaction (Hook & Newland, 2018). Although not an exhaustive framework, the BNCP incorporates significant theories and concepts into a visual representation (Figure 1), providing coaches with a practical model to follow. The BNCP is “designed to influence coaches’ professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge, thereby initiating changes in coaching behaviors” (Hook & Newland, 2018, p. 184).

**Figure 1**

*Basic Needs Coaching Paradigm*



The BNCP prescribes that a coach's behaviors directly influence factors such as, team cohesion, task cohesion, social cohesion, a caring climate, support autonomy, and create a mastery climate. These factors, if influenced by positive coaching behaviors, lead to the fulfillment of the basic needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. When the basic needs are met, an athlete will reach a level of optimal sport experience which is when they are developing their skills and driving for competitive excellence (Hook & Newland, 2018).

The BNCP has not been used to guide a study into the coaching practice but SDT, the main theory contributing to the BNCP, provides some evidence that the BNCP is an appropriate framework to guide this study. Spence and Oades (2011) utilized the SDT in order to optimize the coaching practice. Spence and Oades (2011) chose the SDT because of the comprehensive understanding it provides on human motivation, and more



specifically, because it “provides a useful lens” for coaches to self-reflect on their philosophy and practices on both, micro and macro levels.

Mallett (2005) used SDT to express how the behaviors of a coach directly impact the different forms of motivation within their athletes due to the coaches influence on the basic needs of those athletes; autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The BNCP expands on the influence coaching behaviors have on athletes by including team cohesion, task cohesion, social cohesion, autonomy support, and creating climates that support mastery skill development and a caring environment (Hook & Newland, 2018). It is within those areas where the development of life-skills will happen and the high-impact practices that are being used will be shared.

### **Related Research**

Identifying the practices used by football coaches in their effort to facilitate positive development of their athletes is key to locating areas of growth in the profession. There have been significant amounts of research conducted on adolescent development in history, but that research has mainly focused on the roles that parents have and exclude the roles that teachers and coaches play (Bowers, et.al, 2014). In their study, Bowers, et.al (2014), examined how other non-parental adults can influence that development, specifically coaches. While conducting a review of the literature, the following themes presented themselves; life-skill development, the role of coach, and the coach-athlete relationship. These themes are all individually vital in understanding the practices of GDA football coaches and how those practices translate into the development of their student-athletes.

### ***Life-Skill Development***

Life-skill development within sports programs plays a critical role in nurturing physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills in youth. To ensure positive developmental outcomes, coaches should prioritize life-skill development and create opportunities for athletes to apply these skills beyond sports. According to Kahn, et.al (2019), many sports programs are able to contribute to the development of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills in youth, but only a few explicitly focus on nurturing the social and emotional competencies of their participants. Sports have traditionally been recognized as a valuable learning environment for youth to develop teamwork, communication, sportsmanship, and various other life skills. As discussed by Newman, et. al (2017), youth engagement in sports is often linked to positive developmental outcomes, such as the development of prosocial character traits and different social skills. The impact from coaching can have a larger influence on youth development than the sport itself, if the emphasis is placed on winning then negative developmental outcomes are more likely to occur (Vella, et. al, 2013). In their qualitative study, Trottier and Robitaille (2014) recommend that coaches should incorporate a wide range of life skills in their programs to enhance their ability to teach and adapt to athletes' needs, maintaining a regular focus on life skills with heightened self-awareness, and facilitating life skills transfer through discussions on applying them to other areas of life and practical implementation.

Looking at implicitly structured development programs and explicitly structured programs, Bean, et.al (2018) investigated the role that intentionality played in both. Bean, et.al (2018) stated that “the inherent premise of the continuum is that life skills

development and transfer are optimized have a greater likelihood of experiencing positive development as coaches move up the continuum” (p. 458). The main component of the continuum is that practicing life skills will lead to actual development more so than just talking about life skills, which adds more importance to the notion that incorporating actual life skill development into a coaching philosophy would lead to better outcomes than just discussing (Bean, et. al, 2018). This study will provide information into how GDA football coaches are addressing the need to life skill development through practical applications.

When trying to come to a decision regarding what constitutes life skill development through sports, Pierce, et.al (2018) provided a succinct explanation that can quickly aid in a coach’s decision, “for a skill learned in sport to qualify as a life skill, it must transfer and be successfully applied beyond sport” (p. 11). Student-athletes should know how teamwork applies outside of being on a sports team, how effective communication looks outside of a huddle and how respecting coaches, teachers and teammates looks when you are in a work environment. By working with the football coaches in the GDA, this study will promote the high-impact practices that are being utilized to develop the life skills that will benefit the student-athletes into adulthood. Pierce, et. al (2018) established seven strategies that are effective in promoting the transfer of life skills to athletes; (1) prioritize coaching life skills and recognize the need to intentionally foster transfer, (2) foster life skills mastery and reinforce life skills transfer beyond sports, (3) maintain positive coach-athlete relationships, (4) create opportunities for athletes to apply life skills outside of sport, (5) develop partnerships with key social agents, (6) provide life skills boosters and (7) facilitate athlete reflection

(p. 14-18). Incorporating a wide range of life skills, maintaining positive coach-athlete relationships, and facilitating the transfer of life skills to other areas of life are key strategies for coaches. The ability to define life skills and recognize their application outside of sport is essential for coaches in promoting the holistic development of student-athletes.

Cronin and Allen (2017) effectively placed a definition of life-skills as being skills necessary to process the challenges of everyday life, skills such as “behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal competencies that can be learned, developed, and refined” (p. 105). Others have used more general examples to define life-skills, such as leadership, communication, teamwork, self-confidence, perseverance, respect, sportsmanship, and self-regulation are some of the most important (Camire, et.al, 2018; Kendellen & Camire, 2019; Cronin & Allen, 2017; Kendellen, et.al, 2017). Having the capability to define what skills and characteristics encompass life-skills is important as it provides the opportunity for coaches to make the connection with their programs and the high-impact practices they are using to develop individual skills.

Defining life-skills and highlighting the importance of development of those skills are only part of the equation. Young people often lack the awareness that life-skills they are learning can have direct connections to their lives outside of sport, therefore, coaches need to ensure there is recognition of those lessons (Jacobs & Wright, 2018). One way to enhance this recognition is by having a coaching philosophy that integrates sports and life-skill development rather than keeping them separate (Jacobs & Wright, 2018). In their study, Kendellen and Camire (2019) determined that the transfer of life-skills from sport to life can only take place if athletes are provided opportunities to apply those skills

outside of sport. Those opportunities that GDA football coaches provide is what forms the foundation for this study.

### ***Coach Role***

Being a coach is an important role, coaches assume a variety of responsibilities; they act as a teacher/instructor, organizer/planner, counselor, communicator, and motivator, all of which contribute significantly to the physical and psychological growth of student athletes. (Mariani, 2020; Ferris, et.al, 2015). Coaches also possess the ability to profoundly influence athletes, making it crucial for them to possess knowledge and receive training in diverse leadership approaches. This ensures their capacity to promote motivation in sports and cultivate self-esteem, thus facilitating a well-rounded development in their young athletes (Mariani, 2020). Focusing on the different ways that coaches in the GDA influence their athletes will contribute to the overall understanding of the high-impact practices that are being utilized in life-skill development.

Coaches should strive to be deliberate in their teaching of life skills so their athletes can have the ability to recognize how those life skill lessons can be applied in situations that are outside of sport (Pierce, et.al, 2018; Cronin & Allen, 2017; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014). Unfortunately, there are limitations in the availability of training that can assist in the development of the abilities to properly implement procedures for the transfer of life skill knowledge (Lim, et.al, 2019; Van Mullem & Mathias, 2021; Jacobs & Wright, 2018). Camire, et.al (2012) discussed that the development of life-skills should not be left to chance, but rather, should be a philosophical belief that is aligned throughout the program that utilize thoughtful strategies that lead to intentional outcomes.

Camire, et. al (2012) explained a model that consists of five components; athletes' preexisting makeup, coaching of life skills, explanations as to how life skill development occurs, positive and negative outcomes of participating in sports and the transferability of life skills to non-sport settings. To support this, coaches need to have the ability to create an environment that is supportive for the development of life-skills (Sackett & Gano-Overway, 2017). Additionally, this type of optimal environment would do more than just lead to opportunities for life-skill development, it would also encourage the student-athletes to remain engaged with their sport which would keep that young person engaging with life-skill development for the long-term (Sackett & Gano-Overway, 2017).

In their study, Camire and Trudel (2013) looked at using high school football to promote life-skills and increase student engagement. Camire and Trudel (2013) found that many of the football coaches entered each season with strategies that were related to the development of life-skills; teaching leadership principles, shared personal stories of perseverance, talked about the future, and placing student-athletes in situations that add to their development. Collins, et.al (2009) reported that when high school football coaches had philosophies that placed a priority on development, those coaches felt that it made their team much more successful on the field. By including life-skill development into their philosophy, coaches are able to have the constant reminder of the importance that the development is to them, their athletes, parents, and the entire community.

It is crucial for coaches to possess knowledge and receive training in diverse leadership approaches to effectively influence their athletes. Coaches should be deliberate in their teaching of life skills and create an environment that supports life-skill development. By integrating life-skill development into their coaching philosophy,

coaches can emphasize the importance of individual skill development and promote engagement with life skills in the long term.

### ***Coach-Athlete Relationship***

Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) defined the coach-athlete relationship as “the situation in which coaches’ and athletes’ emotions, thoughts, and behaviors are mutually and causally interconnected” (p. 245). Athletes, especially at the high school level, are influenced heavily by their coaches and those “who played for trained coaches versus untrained coaches, report lower levels of anxiety and higher level of self-esteem” (Gearity & Murry, 2010, p. 213). Gearity and Murray (2010) posited, the experiences of coaches involve both victories and defeats throughout their careers. However, most of the research on effective coaching has focused on head coaches who have achieved a consistently high winning percentage over a long period. This narrow focus is concerning because studies have revealed that athletes' perceptions of excellent coaching and their liking for the coach are more influenced by the coach's behaviors rather than their win-loss record (Eys, et.al, 2013; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Vella, et.al, 2013).

The coach-athlete relationship is one that is mutually beneficial to both the coach’s well-being and the athletes, and is one that necessitates the development of important interpersonal skills; trust, respect, commitment, understanding, and passion (Rezania & Gurney, 2016; Olympiou, et.al, 2008). This relationship, and the interpersonal nexus within it, is instrumental to the coaching process as the climate created by the coach has a direct influence on the athlete’s perception of their relationship with that coach (Olympiou, et.al, 2008). Vella, et.al (2013), found that when coaches demonstrated strong leadership and developed positive relationships with their athletes,

there were stronger signs of social and task cohesion among the team. Developing positive relationships with their athletes fits into a coaching behavior from the BNCP that can lead to the fulfillment of an athletes' basic needs, suggesting that building those relationships can be a high-impact practice in developing life-skills.

An additional process that is heavily influenced by this relationship is the motivational climate created by the coach and inherited by the athlete. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) stated that "coaches' behaviors influence athletes' intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation through their impact on athletes' perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness" (p. 898). Actions by a coach do not impact the motivation of their athletes equally, by recognizing the importance of each relationship, a coach can develop a motivational structure that can have a positive effect on the entire team (Baric & Bucik, 2009; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). In the United States, high school athletes are consistently trying to adjust their needs in order to meet their coach's expectations, but Mageau and Vallerand (2003), concluded that it should be coaches who should adapt their behaviors to fulfill their athletes' basic needs as that has the potential to lead to improved team performance and enhanced motivation which will aid in the development of those athletes.

Understanding the practices of football coaches in life-skill development, their role as coaches, and the coach-athlete relationship provides valuable insights into high-impact practices utilized to facilitate the positive development of student-athletes. By focusing on these areas, coaches can contribute significantly to the growth and well-being of their athletes both on and off the field. Coaches' behaviors and the climate they create directly influence athletes' ability to develop life-skills. This study will reveal what GDA



football coaches define what life-skill development means to them, what their role is in creating an optimal environment for that development, how do they cultivate relationships with their athletes, and finally, how do these football coaches combine everything into high-impact practices that lead to the development of life-skills.

## **Action Research Design and Methods**

### **Positioning**

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), action research (AR) is a dynamic process that involves a plan of action, includes collaboration, has a practical focus using the researcher's own practices, and the sharing of research. The AR method is a continuous, or circular, process that involves cycles of planning, researching, and reflection in order to reach goals (Mong & Standal, 2022). In AR, Cronin and Lowes (2016) stated that the researcher's goal is to improve their practice and initiate change "based on feeling and ambition" that contribute to better outcomes in their field (p. 2).

Cronin and Lowes (2016) stated that "the close pedagogical links between teaching and coaching would suggest that action research may aid coach educators' effect positive changes in their practice" (p.2). Cronin and Lowes (2016) utilized an AR method to examine if embedding experiential learning into coach education programs would lead to the positive outcomes that they defined. This study is similar in that I am researching what high-impact practices GDA football coaches are using to develop life-skills in their athletes. The results of this research will be used to ensure other football coaches have the ability to incorporate these high-impact practices into their own life-skill development program.

## Site and Population Selection

The setting for this study will be high schools within the GDA (Table 1). Sites that will be used are large public, small public, large private, and small private schools. These sites will be used in order to gain insight into the types of resources that are available for coaches to take advantage of in the effort to enhance development. Also, the type of school; public vs private, may lend additional information regarding the impact a school's enrollment has on a football coaches life skill development philosophy.

**Table 1**

### *School Data*

<b>School</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Graduation %</b>	<b>Teacher Ratio</b>	<b>Team Size</b>	<b>Spending per Pupil</b>
School A	1,357	Public	97.5	16.45	70-80	\$13,494
School B	403	Public	97.9	18.66	70-80	\$12,173
School C	523	Private	99.9	13.8	70-75	Data not available
School D	863	Public	97	22.27	50-60	\$12,549

The head football coach from the selected sites makes up the population of the study. Using convenience sampling, a process that invites participants due to their

willingness and availability (Omona, 2013), a group of four coaches, from the sites above, will be selected to participate in the study (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Participant Data*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Formal Development Training</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>College</b>
Coach A	26	1 year	No	Intervention Specialist	Bachelors
Coach B	26	5 years	No	Teacher	Bachelors
Coach C	53	14 years	Yes	Entrepreneur	Master's
Coach D	57	10 years	Yes	Teacher	Bachelors

**Ethical & Political Considerations**

Being a member of the GDA coaching community, I will be faced with confidentiality issues as this community is tight knit and all know each other. My goal was to maintain anonymity throughout the study but I could not control what participants communicated to each other. In order to accomplish this, the Invitation to Participate (Appendix A) was utilized in order to highlight the importance of maintaining confidentiality throughout the process and informing the participants that their names would not be used in the reporting of data (Hesse-Biber, 2016). During the interview process, I did not reveal what other coaches are, or are not, doing and offered no feedback on what coaches were currently doing to support life skill development.

Following the participant review of the data collection process, all identifiable information was replaced by a non-descriptive identifier (Coach A, Coach B, etc.). That confidentiality was maintained throughout the study process.

Participants were fully explained the purpose of the study and how their participation would lead to a better understanding of how important they are in developing life skills in their student athletes. Their experiences and beliefs were able to shine through during the course of the interview process and subsequent clarifying interviews. At each stage of the data collection process, participants were asked to confirm their willingness for participation and guidance was provided for how they can withdraw from the study. All participants were invited to read through the study before being finalized to ensure that I did not miss anything and to also allow them to be the first individuals to see my findings. This process provided me the opportunity to be open and provide full disclosure to the participants and keep them informed throughout the process (Hesse-Biber, 2016).

### **Data Collection Methods**

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) were be conducted as the source of data collection for this study. By utilizing this interview method, I will be allowed to stay focused on the topic while having the ability to explore other items as they come up during the course of the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). An interview guide was created using the guide from Kendellen and Camire (2015) as a model to develop the questions which created three sections within the interview. The first section pertained to the relationships the participants have with their athletes. The second section pertained to the participants coaching philosophy and the final section

pertained to the participants views on life skill development and its impact on their athletes.

The interviews were conducted in-person or over Zoom, based on the preference of the participant. In order to increase rapport, pre-interview meetings took place in an effort to allow the participants to know more about me. A week prior to the scheduled interview, the participants were provided with an informed consent that outlined the purpose of the study, steps to ensure privacy, the structure of the interview, and how the interview data will be utilized. A copy of this consent was then provided prior to the interview to allow the participant to review and confirm the interview can proceed. Each interview scheduled to last between 45 minutes to one hour and at the conclusion of the interview, participants were provided with a document outlining the next steps and guidance regarding their ability to withdraw from the study.

In-person interviews were recorded utilizing an application located on my cell phone, Zoom interviews were recorded using the features within the application. Recordings were processed into mp4 files, and then saved to an encrypted folder and an external hard drive. Files were then submitted to a third-party vendor for transcription. The transcription files were then saved into the same locations, and files were sent to the participants to review and confirm. All collected materials; recordings, transcripts, field notes and journals, will be securely stored for a period of five years following the completion of this study.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

NVIVO (latest edition) will then be utilized to complete the data analysis. Each interview will be transcribed and coded before moving on to the next. I utilized a

thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report the data patterns within the interview data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006), thematic analysis method, I have (1) become familiar with the data, (2) created categories for codes, (3) created themes, (4) reviewed those themes, (5) defined themes, and (6) provided an analytical narrative. This method was chosen due to the flexibility in navigating data and generating themes across language patterns (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This analysis method meant that I was able to develop themes based off of varying language used by participants to identify similar thoughts and ideas.

### **Procedures to Establish Trustworthiness**

#### ***Credibility***

To ensure credibility with my findings, member checking was used. This process involved checking in with participants at different stages of the data analysis to determine if they felt the descriptions were complete and realistic (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). I was then allowed to stay connected with the participants and remain confident that I was not overlooking details.

#### ***Transferability***

Providing thick, rich descriptions of the study led to transferability. Detailing specific information regarding my positionality, the site, criteria, sample, data collection, and data analysis, gives the reader the ability to evaluate whether my conclusions can be replicated to other studies (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

#### ***Dependability***

To ensure dependability, I provided detailed information regarding the research design and its execution. A reflective journal was maintained throughout the entire

research process that allowed for immediate reflection following activities, but also allowed for reflection at various intervals. The journal allowed for opportunities to check that my biases did not influence different aspects of the study. The journal will also allow for a future researcher to repeat my study and potentially have the same results (Shelton, 2004).

### ***Confirmability***

By maintaining an audit trail records of field notes, interview recordings, transcriptions, data analysis, and my journal. These detailed records are all tools that will allow for accountability for all decisions that were made throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004). The specific method that was used was a data-oriented approach “showing how the data, eventually leading to the formation of recommendations, was gathered and processed during the course of the study” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **RESULTS OF RESEARCH**

In an effort to determine what types of high-impact practices football coaches in the GDA are utilizing, several interviews were conducted with coaches in the area that had varying levels of coaching experience. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method of becoming familiar with the data, creating code categories, creating themes, reviewing and defining those themes and then providing an analytical narrative. Following this analysis, three high-impact practices; practices that lead to positive benefits for the student-athletes through "enhanced engagement in a variety of educationally purposeful tasks and gains in deep, integrative learning", were uncovered (Kuh & Kinzie, 2018).

What follows is an overview of each theme and then a discussion that connects each theme to the research question. The three themes; coach role, program development and coach-athlete relationship, will be discussed in relation to how each constitute being a high-impact practice for the development of life-skills.

#### ***Coach Role***

An important theme that was shared by all of the coaches that were interviewed was the role that they play in the development of their athletes. This group of coaches all understood that there was more to their position than just coaching football, with each of them sharing a different, but similar, sentiment about what they viewed their role to be. This theme was also a significant theme from my review of literature, specifically that coaches need to be deliberate in how they teach and coach their athletes so that the life skill lessons are able to be recognized and applied to a variety of situations and scenarios



outside of football (Pierce, et.al, 2018; Cronin & Allen, 2017; Trottier & Robitaille, 2014).

*Interviewee Quotes: Coach Role*

Interviewee	Representative Quote
Coach A	Your job is to really teach leadership and teamwork, really developing young children into men and not just football players.
Coach B	I think at the high school level, you're trying to create young men, good quality young men that are going to contribute to society.
Coach C	Build men
Coach D	Help develop young men physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually through the context of a football program and all of the different activities that take place surrounding a football program

Experience actually played a role in how these coaches were able to authentically define the roles that they play in the overall development of their athletes, both in terms of football skills and life-skills. Coaches A and B were the least experienced of the participants, and while they both were able to articulate the importance of the role, they played but they were still grappling with their overall coaching philosophy and how to incorporate the processes that they know are valuable. Both coach A and B have also gone through a rigorous process of becoming educators very recently, which they both shared that there is a lot of information shared about the importance of understanding the basics of child psychology and the challenges that adolescents face throughout their

development. Coach A offered this statement, which I found to be a great highlight of the importance of understanding child psychology:

That's part of our struggle this year, not because they didn't buy in, but because I don't think they know how to buy in. A lot of people have given up on this group of athletes and the fact that we're all still here and we're still pushing them to their max is confusing to them because they are used to coaches quitting on them.

Hearing these inexperienced coaches describe how they see themselves and the role they fill brings me back to the literature and how important the role of being a football coach truly is. These individuals are expected to assume a large variety of roles; acting as a teacher/instructor, organizer/planner, counselor, communicator, and motivator, which all play a significant role in the overall growth of the players (Mariani, 2020; Ferris, et.al, 2015). The younger coaches know of these various roles, but still lack the experience to be completely confident in how they fulfill the role. In contrast, the more experienced coaches (C & D), have gone through all of the periods of trial and error to figure out what they excel at and where they are lacking. For example, Coach C who self-describes himself as an "old school coach" that was "lucky enough to learn to adapt to kids' learning styles because kids are different nowadays and if you don't adapt, then you're just wasting your time". This was by far the most experienced coach that I interviewed, he gained his experience during times when yelling and screaming was normal but he was aware enough to realize that times have changed and kids have changed, so he better change as a coach if he wanted to continue having success.

The manner in which all four coaches understood the high-impact role they play in the development of life-skills was interesting to me because I went into the process

believing that the younger, less experienced coaches would be overly focused on wins/losses and skill development but that was not the case. Where the younger coaches lacked in this area was that they knew what needed to be done, they just lacked the tools to accomplish the task so they were left focusing more on football and less on life-skills. The experienced coaches had fully developed programs that they ran their players through each year but they lacked the underlying drive to genuinely understand the psychology of their athletes. The most influential practice being utilized is the coach knowing, understanding and prioritizing their role in order to create the best environment possible for the development of all skills in their athletes.

The level of experience was evident to me when these coaches discussed their opinions on their roles with their teams, but it was important that each of them viewed their roles as being immensely important and the overall success of their teams depended on them. Coach B made a statement regarding what he believes his role is that I believe is the foundational understanding for a coach to be able to take the next step; “I think, first and foremost, just teaching the habits that you’re going to need in life through the game of football”. The challenge now is to help these coaches take their understanding of their roles to the next level by placing an emphasis on life-skill development, which will have direct positive impacts on not only their team success, but the overall success of each individual student-athlete (Camire & Trudel, 2013; Collins, et.al., 2009).

### ***Program Development***

This idea of program development actually took on different interpretations among the interviewees. Some of the coaches took the opportunity to talk about how they see their overall program, while others took the opportunity to expand on leadership

development programs that they began incorporating within their overall football program. The idea of life-skill development was something that none of the coaches knew about but as we discussed it further, each coach began to see how some of their own beliefs align with the development of these important skills. Whether it was the experienced coaches discussing pieces of their own leadership development programs they have used throughout the years, or the inexperienced coaches remembering pieces from their teacher education programs that reminded them of the importance of looking beyond just sports. It was also clear that their individual philosophies on coaching, and life, influenced their responses when discussing their programs. All of the responses were valuable and helped expose a small issue facing newer coaches; they can have a difficult time seeing beyond just building a successful football program.

*Interviewee Quotes: Program Development*

Interviewee	Representative Quote
Coach A	Developing them as young men, obviously they're going to get the skills they need to play football, but what I mean by developing young me is, how to be a good student.
Coach B	Teaching the habits that you're going to need in life through the game of football.
Coach C	We need something else other than what we're teaching because we are spending all this time teaching x's and o's, we're not developing them as a person.
Coach D	We exist to help build players of empathy and excellence, who will have a positive influence on their community and their world.

The more experienced coaches consistently dove into sharing details about development programs they created; or played a role in creating, which was unexpected and enlightening. Coach C actually provided one of the best examples of when a coach fully embraces his responsibility to develop all of an athlete and not just his specific sports skills. Coach C went into great detail about how he runs his program, specifically the program he helped build with other coaches from previous jobs called the FINISH Manual. His manual has lessons geared towards; faith and family, initiative, being noble, integrity, sacrifice and humility and his program is running so that both players and coaches lead lessons each Monday. The Monday lessons truly run counter to the majority of the Ohio football coaching community since that is the day that most programs spend time going over scouting reports for the upcoming opponents; Coach C discussed this by stating, “some of my colleagues thought we were nuts”. By incorporating both coaches and players in leading these lessons, Coach C believed that it would “develop ownership, some of your best speakers might not be your best players. Next thing you know, you’re giving these kids a stage to really affect the team without maybe being a player getting reps”.

Coach D seemed to enjoy talking more about his version of life-skill development more than talking about football with me during our interview. When discussing his program, he delivered a response that encapsulates his pride in what he has built, while simultaneously highlighting the struggles the inexperienced coaches face, he stated, “the hard thing is there’s so many things that you want to teach the boys, but there’s limitations to what they can retain. And so, you think in terms of as a teacher, we tried to

develop skills, we call them the Way of the Warrior Traits”. The first portion of that quote is precisely where the inexperienced coaches struggle, they know they want to teach their athletes everything they possibly can but they become overwhelmed by the actual list of items that need to be taught.

The less experienced coaches share the same desire for developing their athletes as their counterparts who have been in the profession for longer, they just lack the planning to take what they have in their minds and put it into an executable program. This is highlighted by a response that Coach B provided to me when asked about he believes life-skill development is, he responded; “it’s leadership, it’s doing the little things, preparing you to be a responsible, hardworking, hopefully, leader that’s contributing to society and helping the world we live in”. Coach B has the right idea but when it comes to execution, that is where the inexperience shows up. When asked how he achieves his vision of life-skill development, he discussed a desire to begin incorporating a leadership class that wasn’t necessarily for the seniors, but the underclassmen, “meeting with them and talking about qualities, skills of a leader”. This response prompted me to dig deeper into why the coach was not moving forward with creating his leadership class, which led to him disclosing that he lacked the time to commit to developing and leading the class and he did not feel that there would be enough support from the rest of the coaching staff.

### ***Coach-Athlete Relationship***

Much of the research that was examined discussed how important it was for a coach to develop a positive relationship with their athletes. As discussed previously, this relationship between a coach and their athletes is one that is mutually beneficial and is

important in developing some interpersonal skills such as, trust, respect, commitment, understanding, and passion (Rezania & Gurney, 2016; Olympiou, et.al, 2008). Ensuring that the relationships developed with their athletes is an important coaching behavior within the BNCP due to the impact a positive relationship can have in achieving social and task cohesion among a team. All of the participants understood the importance of this relationship but they had varied responses about how they feel their relationship are with their current players.

*Interviewee Quotes: Coach-Athlete Relationship*

Interviewee	Representative Quote
Coach A	I worked really, really hard in the beginning especially, to establish a strong relationship, especially with those kids who are more challenging than others.
Coach B	Relationships are the most important part of coaching, just like teaching. Before you can do anything, you've got to build a relationship with your players, because that's how they're going to buy into what you're selling and what you're preaching.
Coach C	This year I had a defensive coordinator and an offensive coordinator, I got to step back and see the body language and frustrations. Since I wasn't a coordinator, I was probably loved a little bit more than sometimes a coordinator feels.
Coach D	I thought that as a head coach, I would have more relationships with players and the reality is you have more relationships, but they're not as deep, they're not quite as prone to come to you if

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they need help because obviously, you're the one in authority and so they're not going to share with you they're bad stuff.

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Being able to witness the difference in how the more experienced coaches discussed their relation with their players compared the inexperienced coaches was enlightening. While all four of the interviewees spoke of the importance of this relationship, hearing about what they are doing to ensure that relationship remains positive is where some differences appear. The most inexperienced coach, Coach A, uses an approach that focuses on ensuring that the team knows they are loved and cared for. Coach A used an example that during a particularly challenging day of practice, he stopped practice to try and address those bad days happen in life but it's how you respond to the bad days. Coach A ended that practice by "explaining to them how much I loved and cared about them and that I would take a bullet for them". This coach is on the right path but his approach could leave some athletes confused, the message he was trying to get across to his team is an important one in working towards a positive coach-athlete relationship, Coach A was attempting to express to his players that he truly loved them. To better ensure that type of message is received by an entire team, Coach A could adapt his behaviors to fulfill the basic needs of his team, focusing on individual relationships which will have a direct impact on the entire team and lead to improved performance and motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

Coach B, who has more coaching experience and classroom teaching experience than Coach A, but is also still many years away from matching the experience of Coach C and D. Coach B talked through the importance of the coach-athlete relationship by



focusing on a key foundational piece which is forming the necessary bonds with the players that leads to a relationship built on trust; “establishing some sort of connection, whether it be at practice, or just some sort of bonding element to where you can relate and then build off of that and get them to trust you”. This coach believes that if you establish that bond and trust, you will be able to have the relationship with your players that can lead to complete buy-in to what you are trying to develop.

Coaches C and D have been in the profession for a lengthy time and have gone through a lot of the trial-and-error stages with how they approach their relationship with their players. The representative quote from Coach D precisely highlights the sentiment that both of these coaches have learned; as a head coach, your relationship with the players is hard to take to a deep and meaningful place without the help of the assistant coaches on the coaching staff. Coach D, when talking about his relationship with the athletes, stated “I had more relationships with players and I think I had more influence overall. I didn’t have as many deep, intimate conversations with my players when I was the head coach as I did when I was an assistant”. Through my own experience as a coach, what Coach D stated was something that I witnessed, the head coach is responsible for so many facets of the team that it can be challenging to form a tight bond with each and every athlete on the team.

The consistently successful coaches seem to embrace a role that sees them delegating a lot of that deep, personal connection to their assistant coaches and then expecting the assistants to keep them informed of things they need to be concerned with. Coach C offered a statement that I believe highlights the idea of having a staff of capable assistants to help manage the relationship; “I get to step back and I get to see, I can see

body language and frustrations, I was probably loved a little bit more than if I were the offensive or defensive coordinator”. This is an area where the more inexperienced coaches tend to get bogged down, they have not yet developed that trust with their coaching staffs to be able to delegate tasks, which can lead to burnout or inadequate development of relationships; both with the athletes and with the rest of the coaching staff.

## **Discussion**

Having been a football coach in various locations across the country, I have had significant interactions with football coaching communities throughout my adult life. However, my interactions with the GDA football coaches have been limited to a couple of years of coaching high school football in Ohio since the 2022 season. These experiences are what has informed my decision to engage the GDA in this endeavor that can lead to some major philosophical changes among the coaching community in the region. Going through this process with the participants, it was important to me to understand how they viewed their roles as coaches and how their views connected with the literature. Being a coach is an important role, coaches assume a variety of responsibilities; they act as a teacher/instructor, organizer/planner, counselor, communicator, and motivator, all of which contribute significantly to the physical and psychological growth of student athletes. (Mariani, 2020; Ferris, et.al, 2015). After going through this process with the participants, it was refreshing to know that they all agreed with the importance of their role, even as some of them were still trying to find their own way.

While speaking with coaches in the GDA, it is apparent that not much has changed in how high school sports coaches view the development of their athletes. While I was in high school, development was strictly focused on getting better at your sport and that was measured by wins and losses. I have coached in other regions of the United States and it was always a similar message, a coach was measured by the success of their team. Coming to the GDA, I was not expecting to find a different attitude. I was surprised to find out that the participants, truly valued their relationship with their players. It was refreshing to see their reactions when I discussed some of the things that I uncovered while completing my literature review, such as, how that specific relationship between themselves and their athletes impacts their own well-being and how it is necessary for the development of life-skills (Rezania & Gurney, 2016; Olympiou, et.al, 2008).

High school coaches in the Dayton area have shown a willingness to try to educate their athletes on more than just sports, some are just not able to determine the right way to incorporate life skill development. I have witnessed different coaching staffs try to build a leadership council that develops leaders within their team. Unfortunately, that precludes the majority of the team and has typically led to signs of favoritism for the specific athletes who seem to always be chosen. When developing life skills in athletes, it is not enough to just have a knowledge base to turn to when needed, high school coaches need to form synergy between that development and their general coaching philosophy (Camire, et al., 2012).

Whether it be basic ideas, such as winning or losing, teamwork, sportsmanship, or much deeper lessons that develop life skills, sports have consistently been viewed as a great instructor of life. Coaches have begun facing challenges with youth that lack the

ability to be accountable, lack motivation, have poor communication skills, have problems with parents, and struggle with school (Gould, et.al, 2006). With the proper direction, sport has the unique ability to combine all of those basic life lessons into a dynamic setting that can mirror settings that young people will often face in adulthood (Newman, et al., 2017, Jacobs & Wright, 2018).

The literature informed me that life-skill development is an important undertaking for high school athletes and the data that I collected confirmed that importance. The data also showed me that coaches do not fully understand the concept, nor do they fully understand how to implement the changes in order to make life-skill development a permanent part of their program. This is why I believe creating the Life-Skill Development (LSD) Toolkit would make an immediate impact on coaching staffs as it will be able to act as a guide for those who wish to make developing these important skills a priority within their programs.

In Table 3, you will see a visual representation of my logic model for the creation of the LSD Toolkit. Below is a brief description of the model:

### ***Inputs/Resources***

The initial inputs and resources for the model are almost entirely research based. I will begin by researching the best practices that have already been discovered by other researchers in the fields of life-skill development and sports coaching. This will help build the foundation for the initial structure and content of the LSD Toolkit. There will also be a need for some potential funding; whether my own or from other entities that are invested in the toolkit, such as a local school district, local community or research organization. Additionally, collaboration with fellow coaches in the GDA will be a vital input for the successful creation of the initial toolkit. Continuing to leverage the growing relationships within the GDA football community to create the toolkit will be key resource in this endeavor.

### ***Outputs***

The key outputs of the logic model include activities and participation. The activities that will go into the creation of the LSD Toolkit include multiple iterations of the action research cycle. This initial LSD Toolkit will not be a refined, finished product. Instead, it will be the first step towards creating a refined product that be utilized in programs across the GDA. The action research cycle will allow me to plan, act, observe and reflect on each iteration to ensure that the LSD Toolkit is being utilized the way it was intended and is having positive results within the coaching community. The participation aspect of the logic model lists the anticipated groups that will benefit the most from going through this process; coaching staffs, student-athletes and the internal/external partners that are playing important roles. These partners include school

administration, teachers, school board members and other individuals within the school community that want to participate.

### ***Outcomes***

The outcomes include short-, medium- and long-term goals for the creation of the LSD Toolkit. Those goals are as follows:

Short-term: An increased awareness of life-skill development, integration of LSD in coaching philosophies and positive feedback from student-athletes

Medium-term: Student-athletes showing signs of life-skill development, enhanced levels of understanding of LSD within coaching staffs

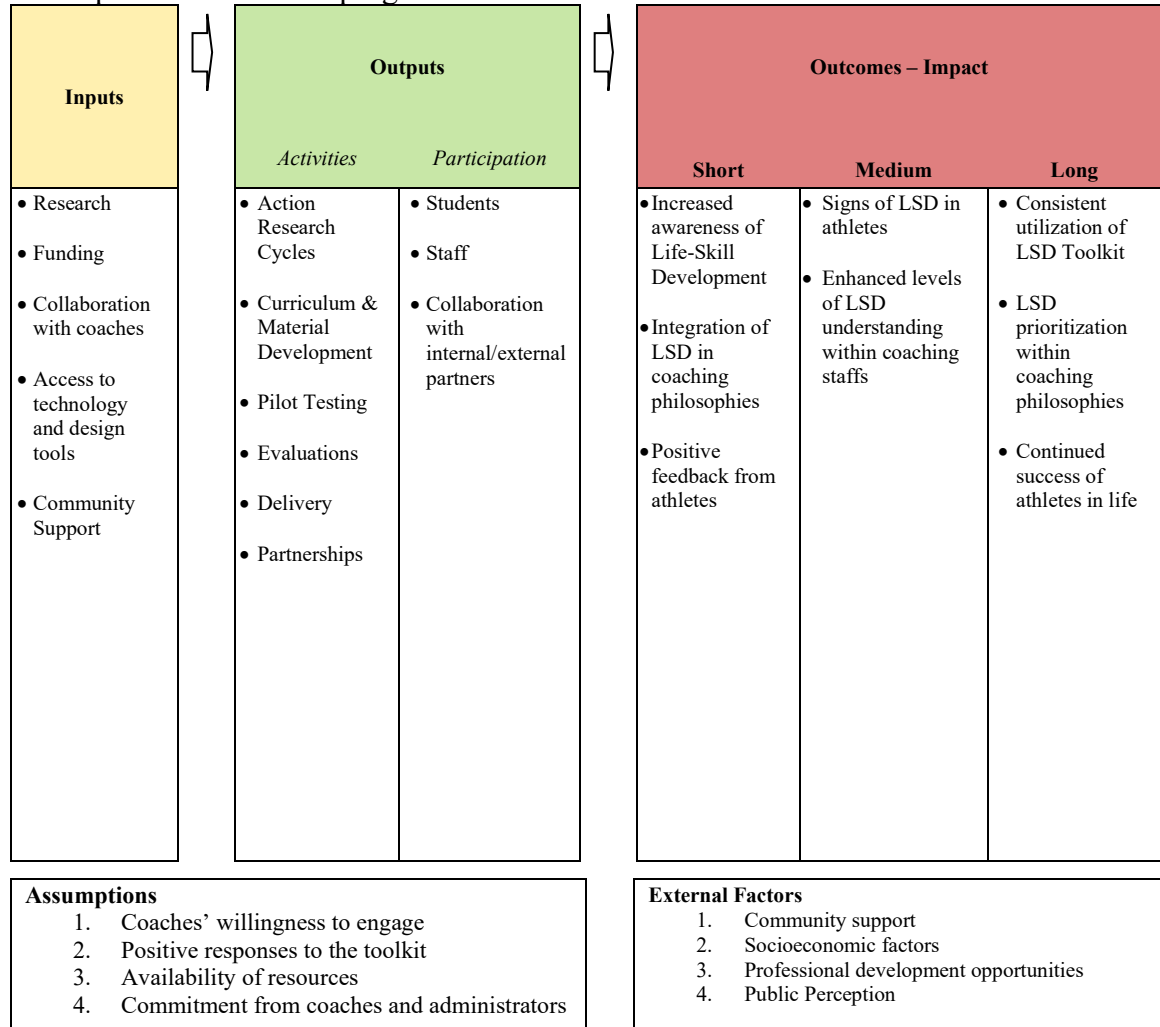
Long-term: Consistent utilization of the LSD Toolkit, prioritization of LSD within coaching philosophies and continued success of student-athletes following their graduation

**Table 3**

*Logic Model*

Program: Life-Skill Development Toolkit

Situation: Create a toolkit for football coaching staffs to utilize to incorporate life-skill development within their program.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ACTION PLAN**

This action plan focuses on the initial stages of creating a Life-Skill Development (LSD) Toolkit that can be used to help guide football coaching staffs as they try to implement life-skill development within their overall coaching philosophies. Based on conversations with the participants, my own experience and support from the literature, it is important to ensure that there are developmental opportunities for coaches to hone and improve their skills (Turgeon, et. al, 2021). Some of the issues facing coaches today is the lack of available combined resources to aid in the development of life-skills (Van Mullem & Mathias, 2021). The LSD Toolkit will be a step in the right direction for coaches needing a resource that will contain lessons on the multitude of skills that are considered life-skills versus just singular lessons on individual skills, which require coaches to look for a variety of resources (Pierce, et. al, 2018; Turgeon, et. al, 2021).

This program will guide coaches as they help their athletes develop behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills through lessons on leadership, communication, teamwork, self-confidence, perseverance, respect, sportsmanship and self-regulation (Camire, et.al, 2012; Camire, et.al, 2018; Kendellen & Camire, 2019; Cronin & Allen, 2017; Kendellen, et.al, 2017). Utilizing the BNCP to guide the LSD Toolkit, the goal is to develop coaching staffs to understand the importance of their athletes reaching the state of optimal performance by addressing their own coaching behaviors. The LSD Toolkit will guide coaches as they begin to learn new coaching behaviors that lead to the development of life-skills of their athletes by focusing on the



basic needs that the BNCP prescribes; competence, relatedness and autonomy (Hook & Newland, 2018).

The LSD Toolkit will begin with a single school and their football coaching staff. Throughout the season, there will be times set aside to debrief on how they feel the program is working and what responses they are seeing within their athletes. Immediate needs will be corrected and the program will be completely reevaluated in the offseason. Utilizing the LSD Toolkit within a high school football program will allow for a consistent method for the development of those skills needed for high school athletes to find success in various life environments (Camire, et.al, 2018). Through this program, the focus will be on developing coaches to identify ways to incorporate life-skill development throughout their coaching philosophy and make that development a priority. There is a challenge in creating a program that focuses on developing coaches due to the prior knowledge and competency of a coaching staff (Van Mullem & Mathia, 2021). Some coaches come from an education background, some come from college coaching levels, and some come with absolutely no background in understanding the adolescent psyche, so the program needs to ensure applicability to all coaches and not make assumptions on individuals understanding of life-skill development (Lim, et.al, 2019).

The initial action plan is focused on developing the initial LSD Toolkit that can be used by high school football programs in the GDA. By doing this, I hope to see some mindset changes among the coaching community, increased development by coaching staffs, and the main goal, see the toolkit being utilized in the development of life-skills in athletes. Using the BNCP again as the guiding framework for the creation of the Toolkit, the goal is to have the athletes, and coaches, reach that point of optimal experience. The

toolkit will be created with the idea that by changing the behaviors of coaches, we can have a direct impact on the basic needs of the athletes and in doing so, the coaches will also become better connected with themselves and their team (Hook & Newland, 2018). In order to accomplish this, I will need to find a high school program that is willing to go through the action research process with me as we build, and continuously refine the LSD Toolkit. I will need the approval and guidance from sources outside of the football program; Board of Education members, Superintendent(s), High School Administration, and even teachers. The process will need to take several cycles of action research in order to get the Toolkit to the point where it can be scaled to additional sports and move to different schools, so having the buy-in from all of the parties will be critical to the long-term success.

**Table 4**

*Action Plan*

Objectives & Outcomes (What)	Tasks (How)	Person(s) (Who)	Time (When)	Location (Where)	Resources	Funds
<u>Objective</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a life-skill development toolkit for a HS Football Program</li> </ul> <u>Outcome</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in mindset from high school football coaches</li> <li>• Develop coaching staffs in order to prioritize life-skill development</li> <li>• Utilize the program to develop life-skills in athletes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a toolkit that outlines the various life-skills and how a coaching staff can implement different methods to ensure the development of life-skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Football coaching staffs</li> <li>• Identifying the high-impact practices they are currently using</li> <li>• Identifying gaps that can be improved</li> <li>• Willing Teachers helping to structure the program so that it <i>can guide a coach to ensure their methods are</i> within what a HS student can comprehend</li> <li>• Administrators to allow access to their facilities, students, coaching staffs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It will take several iterations of the action research cycle to truly perfect the program that will be the finished product</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main goal would be all High schools in the Greater Dayton Area</li> <li>• Realistic is to implement in a single high school within the area and grow as more research is conducted</li> <li>• Find a football program willing to pilot my program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Football Coaches</li> <li>• High School Administrators</li> <li>• Board of Ed Members</li> <li>• Research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School District</li> </ul>

## **Steps Anticipated During the Change Process**

### ***Mindset Shift***

Coaches have the capability to influence all aspects of athlete's experience, including persistence, effort, performance, motivation and overall well-being, so it is important for them to realize that influence and ensure they are entering into their relationships with athletes with the right mindset (Hook & Newland, 2018). The LSD Toolkit is being created to help guide coaches through various stages of creating an environment within their team that places an emphasis on developing these important skills and creating an environment that is optimal for their athletes to learn and develop sport specific skills and life-skills. This toolkit will be an asset in helping shift the mindset of coaching staff's away from only football-specific programming on a daily basis and begin including unique ways to blend the sport-specific lessons with the life-skill development lessons.

By creating this shift in coaching mindset, the Toolkit will be able to aid those coaches that know they want to do something to develop life-skills subconsciously and move the thoughts into their conscious mind and make it happen. In order to do that, we need to help the coaches understand that when their knowledge is put into action, their behaviors can then have a significant influence on the creation of the types of positive environments needed to support their athlete's autonomy and team cohesion, which are two important aspects of the BNCP (Hook & Newland, 2018).

Creating an environment where coaches are able to consciously make decisions to include life-skill development into their coaching philosophy will lead to more successful long-term outcomes in their athlete's; both on the field and off (Cronin & Allen, 2016;

Jacobs & Wright, 2018; Pierce, et.al., 2018). Making life-skill development part of their coaching philosophy, it allows for coaches to make that development a deliberate action, leading their athletes to become more cognizant of how those life-skills can apply in non-sport situations throughout their lives (Pierce, et.al., 2018). It will also be crucial to educate coaches on the need to be selective in choosing only a small number of life-skills to focus on during a season in order to avoid a situation where there is an attempt to cast too wide of a net that can lead to a watering down effect and less than optimal outcomes (Sackett & Gano-Overway, 2017).

### ***Coaching Staff Development***

An additional step that I anticipate occurring during the change process is that coaching staffs will realize the significant value in their own development while learning about how to lead their athletes through life-skill development. Since the LSD Toolkit is rooted in the BNCP, it will be designed in a way that it influences a coaches professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, which will lead to positive changes in their coaching behaviors leading to more opportunities for their athletes to reach that optimal sport experience described within the BNCP (Hook & Newland, 2018). It is my belief that as coaching staffs, specifically those staffs that have younger coaches, begin investing in the toolkit and its lessons, they will begin to see growth not only in their players, but in themselves as well.

Through their own development, the coaching staffs that utilize the toolkit will begin to fully grasp the amount of influence they truly have over their athletes' development and that creating a positive environment for them to flourish, they will begin to discover that their impact will allow for the transference of life-skills that cut

across the various context of their lives (Ferris, et.al., 2015). Seeing growth in the mindset of coaches to move beyond just teaching the game of football, to a mindset of teaching football and life to their athletes is one of the most rewarding changes that I anticipate seeing as the LSD Toolkit is put to use. Additionally, head coaches will be able to have confidence in their assistants to be able to handle more of the life-skill development of the athletes which can remove the extra burden from the head coach.

### ***Life-Skill Development***

The final, and most important part of the change process that I am anticipating is the eventual development of life-skills within the student-athletes themselves. This part of the change process is not something that will occur instantaneously, but rather a change that you will surely need to understand what is happening to notice in the early stages. As coaches become comfortable with utilizing the LSD Toolkit and begin installing periods of life-skill development within their practice, the initial outcomes will probably result in a process known as near transfer. Near transfer is when an athlete would learn a lesson from a situation and be able to recall that lesson the next time that situation presents itself. An example of this near transfer process, as explained by Jacobs and Wright (2018) would be “a coach can use an instance where a student loses their temper during a soccer practice to demonstrate the importance of maintaining self-control”, which can then translate into a discussion among the entire team about the importance of self-control during the game (p. 89).

In the early stages of the action plan, I expect to see many examples of near transfer and as the coaches become better trained and equipped, you will then begin to see the signs of the larger impact from the LSD Toolkit. At that point, we will begin

seeing the signs of far transfer which essentially means that the athletes will be able to take lessons learned during practice and apply them to various situations they may encounter in their daily lives. An example of this far transfer process, as explained by Jacobs and Wright (2018) would be when an athlete sets a goal to have less than 5% of passes thrown to them dropped, they are able to use that same goal setting strategy and apply it to their academics and personal lives. This far transfer process is where we want the athletes to eventually find themselves as their coaches develop their own life-skill development processes with the help of the LSD Toolkit.

Additionally, as this process begins to consistently make impacts, the signs should be getting clearer that the coaching staff has created an optimal climate for skill development; both for football and life. Sackett and Gano-Overway (2017) state “creating the optimal sport climate not only can create opportunities to foster life skills, but also motivate athletes to continue their sport engagement, which can promote long-term engagement important to life-skill development” (p. 212). Meaning that as the climate surrounding the football program reaches that optimal state, the environment will be perfect for the development of life-skills and maintaining the positive motivational atmosphere for students continued involvement with football.

### **Connection to Theoretical Framework**

Harkening back to the Basic Needs of Coaching Paradigm (BNCP) that provided the theoretical framework for this study, it is clear that the participants desire their student-athletes to achieve the optimal sport experience. It is important for me to briefly examine the aspects that make up the BNCP. At its core, the BNCP is focused on athletes reaching the optimal sport experience, which Hook and Newland (2018) define as “a state

of enjoyment, satisfaction, and well-being experienced by athletes when their basic needs are satisfied” (p. 183). These basic needs, as explained by Hook and Newland (2018) are; competence, knowing and understanding what is being asked of them; relatedness, being able to form connections with their teammates and coaches within a positive, caring environment; and autonomy, feeling like the coaches are able to see from the athlete’s perspective and having their feelings recognized.

The LSD Toolkit that the action plan describes, uses the BNCP as the foundation for each of the lessons for coaches to understand the value of developing life-skills in their athletes, but also developing the understanding of what is necessary to provide for their athlete’s basic needs in football. Football coaches can influence every aspect of a student-athlete’s pursuit of the sporting experience through team cohesion, task cohesion, social cohesion, creating a caring and mastery climate and through autonomy support, all of which will lead to creating that optimal experience if done correctly (Hook & Newland, 2018). Once a coach understands the BNCP, they will be able to use that knowledge to then take the life-skill development toolkit and apply it to their teams.

### **Analysis of Future Implementation**

Coaching is a demanding profession that places many duties onto a singular person; the head coach, and it is up to that individual to delegate these duties or be hindered by the burden of the tasks (Lim, et.al, 2019). This is the organizational saga that faces the football coaching profession, the accepted norms of the profession are that coaches are left to make decisions for their programs based on their experiences and knowledge (Clark, 1972). Coaches currently prioritize winning as their top objective, followed by helping their athletes have fun, and helping develop physical, psychological,



and social skills (Gould, et.al, 2006). By creating a life-skill development model, football coaches will be provided with a guide for how to develop those important physical, psychological, and social skills within their daily practice plans. By intentionally implementing certain activities within the football environment, certain life-skills can be taught and their application beyond sport can be better understood versus just talking about how different skills can apply (Kendellen, et.al, 2017).

Understanding that the perfect program cannot be created instantly, after each football season the LSD Toolkit will need to be evaluated and assessed. This evaluation will be conducted using the EvaluLEAD Conceptual Model as a framework for designing an assessment that looks at each preferred outcome of the life-skill development program (Black & Earnest, 2006). This model was created to measure the outcomes of leadership development programs, which leadership development is just a singular aspect of the life-skill development program and is a holistic design that encourages looking for outcomes on different levels; individual, organizational, community and societal levels (Joseph-Richard & McCray, 2022).

### **Analysis of Organizational Change & Leadership Practice**

As the initial action plan is focusing solely on a singular football program, the organizational changes that will occur should be impactful. One of the major changes to occur from this is coaches understanding of self-determination theory and how it applies to their athletes being naturally inclined to learn, grow, and to connect socially with their peers but that the proper supportive conditions need to be present in order for that to occur (Manninen & Campbell, 2022).

Many coaches that I interviewed classified themselves as *transformational leaders*, but most of them could not immediately highlight the importance of followership in their lives. This is one area that the LSD Toolkit aims to disrupt the current idea of leadership within a football program. The main theme that was present when the participants discussed in how they currently implement life-skills, most was leadership focused, but I posit that young people must first learn how to properly follow someone's leadership before becoming a leader. By utilizing the followership role orientation and behaviors as outlined by Carsten, et.al, (2018), the life-skill development toolkit will focus on guiding football coaches through ideas of co-production; followers should engage actively and share responsibility with leaders, and passive orientation; let the leader lead and the follower follow, offers little assistance in the leadership process. By focusing initially on creating strong followers, the coach will begin to see the positive impacts on the team's overall leadership through the co-production orientation which would have a ripple effect throughout the organization (Carsten, et.al, 2018).

In order for the LSD Toolkit to be truly embraced by the coaching community, there needs to be a shift in the way coaches are evaluated by their superiors and their community. Currently, coaches are defined by their wins and losses, how many conference championships they have won, how many times they have qualified for the state playoffs and the number of their athletes that have gone on to play football in college. I believe that a coach's record should become less of the emphasis on the overall quality of a coach and their suitability for their high school.

The initial premise for the LSD Toolkit is that it will be broken down in sections that mirror the important life-skills that young athletes need to begin developing. It will

be broken into two main sections; offseason and season, allowing for coaches to have the ability to focus on events at different points of their football calendar. Initially, the main development objectives will focus on teamwork, communication, leadership, self-confidence, perseverance, respect, and self-regulation, all of which are vital behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills necessary to process the various challenges they will face throughout their lives (Cronin & Allen, 2017). Within each of those specific skills, there will be information that outlines various characteristics of that component and a list of ideas that coaches can use to integrate into their plan for any specific day. For example, if a coach wanted to integrate specific lessons regarding the importance of teamwork, the toolkit would provide a listing of various football activities that can be included within their practice script for the day, along with key points that the coaches should ensure they talk about with their team. The LSD Toolkit, at least initially, will not be able to provide every answer, but as it is used and revised and continuously improved, someday it will be equipped to provide all of the answers.

The initial way that school leaders; Athletic Directors, Assistant Principals, Principals and Superintendents, can begin the process of changing the organizational culture for coaches is by understanding role theory. In the GDA, there are no coaches that have the sole role of just being the football coach. These individuals serve in multiple capacities, with most of them serving as teachers or support staff within the schools they are employed, some are also parents and have responsibilities that are external to their roles within their school. According to Anglin, et.al. (2022), individuals that have multiple roles can have their behaviors impacted by those roles and the perception of them are also influenced by their roles. School administrators need to make themselves

aware of this role theory and ensure they are adequately defining the specific role of football coach and removing obstacles that can contribute to a conflict between the roles they fulfill (Anglin, et.al., 2022). Coaches who are also educators, or support staff, within a school should have each role viewed individually and not find themselves having their roles combined in the eyes of their superiors. They should be evaluated as strictly a football coach and then strictly as a teacher.

The school administration also needs to be prepared to deal with external groups that do not believe in the new philosophy of focusing less on wins/losses and more on the developmental outcomes of their sons or daughters. This shift in thought process will not be easy for some parents to agree with. The administration will need to exert some levels of leadership when it comes to managing the expectations and concerns that will initially come their way, which will allow the coaching staff to feel supported throughout the process. Administrators will need to become familiar with the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory as this will help them with managing these external factors, while simultaneously extracting more out of their coaching staff. In the LMX theory, according to Vermeulen, et.al., (2022), “high-exchange relationships, characterized by more trust, liking and respect based on expectations of mutual exchange and therefore reinforcing trust, liking and so on, lead to more extra role behavior of employees, or in other words employees are more inclined to do more than the role description” (p. 495).

### **Implications for Practice & Future Research**

While this study provided quality information regarding the development of a formal training program for high school football coaches in the GDA, it also led to some additional areas for potential future research. Additionally, the small sample size and lack

of diversity represented in the participants provides other avenues to continue exploring the high-impact practices being used by coaches in the GDA to develop life-skills in their athletes.

### ***Implications for Practice***

In this study, the BNCP was used to guide the research with an emphasis on creating the optimal sports environment for adolescent student-athletes to be able to develop life-skills and with that, but it can also be used to try and create developmental programs for coaching staff's, teachers or additional school-based employees. From this study, the LSD Toolkit will be developed utilizing some of the high-impact practices that GDA coaches have used and fill the gaps for the parts of the coaching community that are faced with uncertainty on how to develop those skills or that view these skills as unimportant.

By creating, and constantly refining, the LSD Toolkit will be an asset for coaching staffs to refer to in order to garner ideas of how to connect their sport with various life-skill development opportunities. Through this, coaching staffs will be able to better develop their own coaching skills while simultaneously developing those important skills in their athletes that will be carried well beyond their time playing. Below are two areas that I believe this study could have impacts beyond life-skill development in the GDA coaching community:

### **Coaching Development**

This study was solely focused on what GDA coaches were doing to develop life-skills in their athletes, but it became clear, while conducting the research, that some coaches wanted to do more but lacked the knowledge or training to make an effort. The

implications that this study can have on the development of coaches is immense. There is currently a lack of formal training programming for football coaches in the GDA, almost everything available is through camps, clinics or by working with mentors. It has been discussed by Turgeon, et.al (2021), that a coaching education program can become a catalyst to the effort to “maximize the positive influence of high school sport on student-athlete development” (p. 173). This goes beyond just the premise of this study, a carefully crafted education program can lead to positive outcomes in all facets of a sports program, if done properly.

Taking this a step further, high school sports are an ideal avenue for development of life-skills in students and if it is structured appropriately, it can enhance the overall view of the school as a whole and its ability to meet its educational missions (Camire, et.al, 2018). If the coaching staff is properly developed to focus on the positive development of the student-athletes, there could be more widespread positive views on the performance of the entire school district. The coaches will begin to see their roles in a different light and become more astute to the overall needs of their athletes. This study and the LSD Toolkit, in particular, will become an essential tool for those coaches that truly want to make a larger impact beyond their sport.

### **Coach-Athlete Relationship**

Another important facet of the coaching culture as a result of this study will be the attention placed on creating a positive coach-athlete relationship. Positive developmental outcomes are consistently connected to the perception of a strong coach-athlete relationship, while the inverse of that is also true (Vella, et.al, 2013). This study touched on the importance of the coach-athlete relationship and the significant connection it has

in ensuring that there is a positive motivational climate which creates the ideal environment for learning life-skills and sport-specific skills (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Zhao & Jowell, 2023). By bringing increased attention to the importance of this relationship, coaches who read this study will understand the role that they play is crucial for a positive outcome.

The LSD Toolkit will have a direct impact on creating a positive coach-athlete relationship. Each of the sections will be rooted in the BNCP and maintaining a positive environment for the athletes to flourish, with key reminders to be cognizant of the types of relationships that the coaches are building with their athletes. By keeping the relationship in constant focus, it will truly be the coach's responsibility for the outcome of their relationship.

### ***Implications for Research***

In addition to the implications this study can have on the coaching community, it also can have an impact on future research. While this study focused on what coaches are doing to develop life-skills, there is room to expand on the entire topic of life-skill development. There has been more research taking place on this idea of “deliberately addressing life skills transfer during the act of coaching”, there is still a lack of “evidence-informed resources” available for members of the high school coaching community (Pierce, et.al, 2018, p. 13). More research can be done in order to identify those high-impact practices that coaches around the world are utilizing that leads to successful development of life-skills within adolescent athletes. That research can then be used to create meaningful programming that can be shared by all. Additionally, the actual action of learning a life-skill and applying that lesson to a subsequent action of life is

another area of importance for future research. This is a complex process that coaches play an integral role in and having the ability to dive deeper into the complexities can have a beneficial long-term outcome for those coaches that want to create a life-skill development program (Kendellen & Camire, 2018).

Looking forward to my future research plans, I hope to use this study as the foundational piece as I continue to create more refined versions of the LSD Toolkit. As I continue to become a more skilled researcher and practitioner, this study will be what I consistently come back to as I continue searching for ways to advance the idea of purposeful life-skill development through sports and using the BNCP as my framework. This study will hopefully allow me to enter into discussions with other practitioners in the field, which will bring about more opportunities to continue progressing forward and completing additional cycles of research in this topic that is important.

### ***Implications for Theory***

The BNCP has been underutilized in researching coaching behaviors and those impacts on youth athletes. It is my hope, that being one of the first practitioners to apply the BNCP to my research, that others will begin to see the value and applicability. In my future research, I am considering using different language for portions in order to help other coaches to quickly grasp the purpose as I spent significant amounts of time just explaining the various attributes of the BNCP. My aim is to continue to connect with coaches and show them the value of the LSD Toolkit, but I believe that I need to ensure that there is an understanding of WHY it was created and in order to explain that, I will need to be able to quickly explain the BNCP, its importance and the impact it had on the creation of the LSD Toolkit. In doing so, I should be able to help fill the applicability



gaps that are currently present in the BNCP. Going through action research cycles will only lend more and more credibility, hopefully propelling the BNCP to the front of other practitioners' minds and making it a tool that is used more widely.

## **Conclusion**

This study is just the starting point for what will become an important focus for the GDA football coaching community. Having the ability to get football coaches to discuss what they are doing for their student-athletes to prepare them for life is an important endeavor and by collecting their high-impact practices and sharing them with others, the intention is to create a conversation and get more and more coaches on board with becoming proactive in the development of life-skills. Reflecting on the process, it is clear that more coaches need to be interviewed and the importance of life-skill development shared with everyone, this was just the initial cycle of a continuous, action research process.

The results of this study pointed to a need to create something that can be used to aid coaches as they go down the path of life-skill development within their programs. In an effort to fill that need, the LSD Toolkit will be a resource to assist coaches on the journey. In a perfect world, every coach will read every page and include every idea that will be included in the toolkit but it will not be necessary in order to achieve results within a program. If just a single idea is taken from the LSD Toolkit and is utilized within a football program, then I believe it was successful because it is being created to be a simple tool that can be included in a coach's toolbelt and coaches bring their own experience and knowledge to the development of their athletes. The outcome that is most

important to me is that coaches see the tremendous value in developing life-skills in their athletes.

The early portions of the toolkit will contain sections that explain the various stages that should be utilized and the reasoning behind them. These sections will include ideas such as; initial planning and preparations, how to conduct life-skill development sessions, the importance of ongoing reflection, mid-season check in's, post-season evaluation, and the offseason reflection and planning. With that said, the LSD Toolkit will also be structured so that each section can be used as a standalone template to be applied for specific aspects of development, Table 5 provides an example for how the sections will be structured.

**Table 5**

*Example of Life-Skill Component Section of LSD Toolkit*

<u>Component</u>	Each section will start by naming the specific skill that will be introduced, for example, a section may be titled <i>Perseverance</i> , so that entire section is going to relate solely to developing that skill.
<u>Objective</u>	The objectives for each component will be clearly defined for coaches. The objectives will range from short- to long-term goals for each. This will allow the coaches to have a vision for what mastery of each skill should look like.
<u>Self-Reflection</u>	This section is meant for coaches to self-reflect on their own understanding and knowledge of each component. It should assist the coaches identifying any gaps in their own understanding of the skill and help highlight the aspects that they know.
<u>Action</u>	Here is where the various tools/tips will be located that will assist in the development of each skill. Coaches will have the ability to pick and choose from the list and go into the next section for different ways to integrate into practice.
<u>Integration Ideas</u>	Here the coaches will find various ways to integrate the action items within a normal practice plan. It will list out commonly used practice drills/sessions and have corresponding tools to integrate the skill development within that specific drill or session.
<u>Reflection</u>	Reflection is very important to the long-term success of the LSD Toolkit. It will be imperative for coaches to constantly reflect following the use of development sessions so that they can work on their own development of teaching these skills. Here is where they can highlight what worked well, or what did not work.

In my opinion, high school football in the GDA is some of the best in the state of Ohio and this process allowed me the opportunity to highlight four coaches from this region, that value the development of their athletes beyond just football. This study highlighted that there is a glaring need for a process to help coaches develop their own understanding of life-skill development and a process to begin installing it within their programs and philosophies. The more experienced coaches have been able to get by strictly with their own life experiences, but there is a need to fill that void for the younger coaches that do not have the same experience.

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## APPENDIX A

### Invitation to Participate in Research

## INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

### Surveys and Interviews

- Research Project Title: **Examining High-Impact Coaching Practices: A Study on Life Skill Development in High School Football Programs within the Greater Dayton Area**
- You have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by: Ron Johnson from the University of Dayton, in the Department of Educational Administration

The purpose of the project is: to explore the high-impact practices that high school football coaches in the Greater Dayton Area utilize to develop life skills in their athletes.

- Answering the questions will take about 45-60 minutes.

**You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.**

- Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right not to answer any question and to stop participating at any time for any reason
- You will not be compensated for your participation.
- All of the information you tell us will be confidential.
- If this is a recorded interview, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to the recording and it will be kept in a secure place.
- If this is a written or online survey, only the researcher and faculty advisor will have access to your responses. If you are participating in an online survey: We will not collect identifying information, but we cannot guarantee the security of the computer you use or the security of data transfer between that computer and our data collection point. We urge you to consider this carefully when responding to these questions.
- I understand that I am ONLY eligible to participate if I am over the age of 18.

**Please contact the following investigators with any questions or concerns:**

*Ron Johnson, [rjohnson4@udayton.edu](mailto:rjohnson4@udayton.edu), 937-229-5542*

*Matt Witenstein, faculty supervisor, [mwitenstein1@udayton.edu](mailto:mwitenstein1@udayton.edu), 937-229-3105*

**If you feel you have been treated unfairly, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please email [IRB@udayton.edu](mailto:IRB@udayton.edu) or call (937) 229-3515.**

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview Protocol

##### Interview #1

###### *Objectives*

1. Establish a rapport between the participant and the researcher.
2. Identify high-impact practices utilized for the development of life skills in student-athletes.
3. Identify any gaps that may need further development.

###### *Questions*

**NOTE: A semi-structured approach to the interview will be used. Thus, the following questions will be used as a guide; however, additional questions may emerge during our discussion.**

1. What do you believe your role as the head football coach means?
2. How would you describe your relationship with your players?
3. What is your coaching philosophy? Can life-skill development be incorporated in that philosophy?
4. Do you believe that football lessons translate off of the field? Why or Why not?
5. What does “Life-Skill Development” mean to you?
6. How do you incorporate Life-Skill Development into your program?
7. Do you have any challenges with Life-Skill Development? What about successes?
8. Do you notice your athletes’ facing challenges with Life-Skills?
9. If you could put together a Life-Skill Development program from your players, what might that look like? What would be included?